

Some Tribal Origins, Laws, and Customs of the Balkans

THE POSTRIPA GROUP

619 Postripa is obviously a name bequeathed by the Romans. It consists
 175 of five tribes, all included in the Diocese of Pulati. Much of Postripa
 is Moslem, for it was quarrelled about by several bishops. In 1702
 Pope Clement XI, who was of Albanian blood on his mother's side,
 sent Vicentius Zmajevitch as Visitator Apostolicus, who reported
 among other lamentable things that three bishops were all claiming
 Postripa, and that meanwhile the people are left "without leader or
 shepherd, like a scattered flock subject to oppression and persecution."

In Postripa are included five tribes:—

619 1. *Mazreku*.—A small Catholic tribe. That the place was in ancient
 175 days a centre of civilization is shown by the considerable ruins of an
 614 abbey, Shenkol Shati, believed to have belonged to the Benedictines
 and to be the one mentioned by several ancient writers as not far from
 Scutari. It is now lost in a tangle of trees and brushwood. There is
 [784] a strong feeling throughout Albania against felling trees on the spot
 where a church once existed—a feeling that probably goes back to the
 very ancient days of sacred groves. The abbey presumably fell into
 ruin when the Serbs seized the district in the Middle Ages. The hatred
 [792] of the Serb Orthodox for the Catholics was shown in 1913 in the
 Balkan War, when the Montenegrin troops, whose object was said to
 be "to liberate Christians," fell upon the little church of Mazreku,
 trampled the Host under foot, dressed up in the priestly vestments,
 danced about, and amused themselves by cutting off the noses from
 images of the saints and firing bullets into the crucifix.

2. *Drishti*.—A small Moslem tribe that was almost annihilated in
 1913 by the Montenegrins. Drishti is the site of the ancient city of
 Drivasto, in ancient days a bishopric, mentioned as early as 877.
 The town was entirely destroyed by the Turks, who beheaded the
 leaders before the walls of Scutari—then too besieged—in order to
 terrify the Scutarines into submission. The wasted spot was afterwards
 settled by incomers from the neighbourhood of mixed origin. And
 in the period when three bishops were quarrelling for Postripa the
 Drishti folk all turned Moslem.

3. *Shlaku*.—A tribe of one bairak on the right bank of the Drin, in a
 [779] very poor district. It is all Catholic and traces origin from Toplana (q.v.).

4. *Dushmani*.—A Catholic tribe of two bairaks—Temali and Dush-
 mani. Dushmani takes its name from a chieftain family which ruled here.
 In 1403 "Goranimus, Damianus, and Nenada, brothers Dusmani,
 Lords of Pulati Minor," offer themselves as subjects to Venice and
 swear fidelity on condition that Venice will guarantee them in possession

527 incident that occurs during its twelve hours is
777 believed to presage the events of the corresponding
months of the coming year, and the events of the first
day of each month the character, lucky or unlucky, of
the other days generally. It is unlucky to work in the
[461] fields during the first week of October, and no corn
is sown this month, as the crop would be sure to fail.

527 The period between the 15th of November and
777 the 6th of January is, like the Greek *Fishoti* and
776 the Bulgarian *Kulada*,¹ supposed to be the carnival
● 784 time of the Vilas and other supernal beings, who
are, at that season, not only more active, but more
powerful than at others, and especially during the
night. After sunset, consequently, people refrain
from going abroad, or drinking water, for fear of
mischief, and give no credence to their dreams. They
are also careful not to leave any article of wearing ap-
[296] parel out of doors after nightfall, and if, by some
oversight, a garment should be so left, it is washed
before being used, in order to get rid of any spell cast
upon it by the supernals.

527 Christmas, which bears a name (*Kolendrael*²) ap-
777 parently connected with those by which it is known
among the Bulgarians and Vlachs, is observed with
ceremonies that recall those of more Northern nations,
as well as with some similar to those of their last-
mentioned neighbours. On the 24th and 25th of

¹ Vol. I. pp. 123 and 329.

² Von Hahn derives this name from the *koléndra*, the ring-shaped cakes made at this season. I would, however, suggest the greater likelihood of the cakes having been named after the name of the feast in its various forms of (Albanian) *Kolendrael*, (Vlach) *Kolindi*, and (Bulgarian) *Kulada*.

embodied in a code there is an end to its spontaneous development. :

671 But to reach this stage the code must be an enacted code, written and recorded, and this the pronouncements of the Albanian law-givers failed to achieve. On the contrary their codes seem to have remained in the verbal custody of the village or tribal elders and subject to modification or reinterpretation from time to time by assemblies of clans or villages. It is at this stage that we have Mrs Hasluck's account of Albanian customary law—law primitive enough in many ways to be compared with the customary law of tribes much less civilized than the Albanians; but it reached the point, and that some five hundred years ago, of becoming codified verbally by the efforts of individual law-givers, Skanderbeg in particular and the famous Lek Dukagjini, without having reached the stage of enactment. This was principally due to the fact that there was no one able to enforce sanctions over the Albanian community as a whole; individual Albanian chieftains had not the power, and Turkish rule interfered but little outside the towns.

622 It was no doubt this absence of any such sanctions as those provided by an enacted law and enforced by a settled government, or merely even by the continuity in administration of a single ruling family, which was the primary cause of the firm establishment of the vendetta as the real sanction for all Albanian law and custom. At the same time, however, economic conditions have probably contributed to this result, for in a richer country the administration of justice might have been made profitable to any ruler strong enough to provide it. Thus Albanian customary law not only reflects an economic stage through which most nations have passed before the establishment of enacted codes, but also a condition, by no means unique but very far from universal, in which poor and isolated communities have resorted to the vendetta for the sanction of their law, and that in spite of any influence that

171 Christianity or Islam might have had to prevent it. The etiquette of the vendetta itself is likewise a customary code not dissimilar to

623 17817 taboo in nature and origins; and without any more definite sanction, or naturally any sort of legislative enactment, regular and almost technical forms of procedure have come into existence in what virtually are regularly constituted courts. In this the Icelandic practices, as described in the sagas of Njal and Kormak, for instance, afford a near parallel to those of Albania, and Mrs Hasluck's account of Albanian custom will prove of importance not

for the violation of her honour by the push than for the bruise, was not satisfied and instigated her son, a boy of twelve or thirteen, to vindicate her honour by killing Gjelosh's son, who was of the same age. Since the boys habitually herded their goats together, her son found an opportunity of pushing the other boy over a rock and as he lay there helpless he stoned him till he died. Then Gjelosh, still in prison, paid a man to kill the little murderer. Grimës retorted by killing Gjelosh's remaining son and dooming Gjelosh's family to extinction.

Two instances, both from Beshkash in western Mat, in which a child was killed by a woman in revenge for the death of a relative, are recorded. In the first (about 1918) the only son of Pushko Zefi of Beshkash had been killed, and the cousins, who were his natural avengers, did not seem inclined to do their duty. Maddened by their inaction, the victim's sister, who was married in Perlat, took the opportunity provided by a visit to her old home and called at the enemy's house. On being left alone for a moment with a small boy in the kitchen, she cut his throat. Another woman in Beshkash, crazed by the murder of her grown-up son by Pal Dede Hajo, went to Pal's house and cut off the head of a little boy she found asleep in his cradle.

Since women do not have rifles or blood feuds according to the Kanùn, a woman could not possibly be killed to avenge a murder. It follows that when a woman avenged a murdered relative, she could not be killed in return, and indeed this did not happen very often. The tabu on killing a woman in any circumstances was reinforced by all the forces of public opinion and superstition. Killing a woman save when taken in adultery or incorrigible pilfering was the most disgraceful thing that an Albanian could do. Only one who came from 'a low-class family' would do it, he never again had any luck with his rifle and he could not hope to have his crime pardoned, but must wash away his crime with his blood. He need pay with only one life, but if his victim was a married woman, he could hardly hope to save it, for two or even three families sought to take it. The dead woman's husband wished to avenge his wife, her father his daughter, and, in Martanesh, her maternal uncle his niece. At Shënjon, near Elbasan, the father asked the husband if he meant to kill the enemy; if from cowardice or weakness he said no, the father at once set about tracking down the enemy. Since 'rifles can't weigh'—that is, discriminate—a

*562 woman was sometimes shot accidentally in a man's stead in spite of
 628 the tabu. In that unhappy event in Kurbin a woman in the
 672 murderer's family might be killed in return. If, too, a feud was
 784 unusually bitter, as was, for instance, the Kaloshi family one in
 Dibër, all barriers of law and disgrace were thrown down; 'kill at
 all costs' was the order of the day, and in its execution women and
 children were as likely as men to suffer.

[421] This tabu on killing women had several sources. In the first
 place, a woman was 'a sack for carrying' things, i.e. she was the
 vehicle by which a family was carried on, and killing her might
 mean the loss of more than one man to her husband's family. Then
 she carried no arms, and therefore was classed with old men,
 children, and lunatics as safe from an avenger. Again, she was
 always regarded as an article of property, belonging in her maiden
 days to her father and afterwards to her husband; her father had
 the right to her work till she married, and her husband afterwards;
 in token of this work her father sold her dear, and her husband
 bought her dear. Articles of property could not be damaged in
 the course of blood feuds. There was also the feeling that it was
 a disgrace for a 'strong' man to kill anything so inferior as a
 woman.

The tabu on killing women was so strong that when one
 committed a murder, not she but one of the males in the family
 expiated the crime, if expiation were possible. Murders by women
 fell into two categories, the first outside and the second inside the
 family. In both cases the murderess might commit the crime on her
 own account or butt into a men's quarrel to avenge a murdered
 relative.

*628 One more class of expiator remains to be considered. It some-
 672 times happened that a man hired an outsider to kill his enemy. In
 [754] the Breg i Matit some held that such a man was a 'witch', and
 676 since witches could not have blood feuds, he must go scot-free and
 his hireling suffer, like any other murderer. In most places, if the
 instigator could not be discovered, or if time was passing without
 vengeance being taken on him, the hireling was killed. These
 practices were exceptional, and in general the feud was credited to
 the principal rather than to the subordinate who fired the fatal shot.

[554] Vanity as well as justice came into the question, for the instigator
 was usually a more important person than his instrument, and
 killing him brought the avenger more glory.

SECTION VIII

SOME BALKAN TABOOS. IRON. HAIR

I. PROPITIATING THE STRANGER

In a land where magic is still practised it is not surprising to find some ancient taboos still alive.

Of the many things that mankind fears, the unknown is perhaps the most dreaded. Therefore in old days, when travellers were scarce, save on well-marked trade routes, the stranger was an object of great suspicion. Who could tell what evil spells he might work? Magic was then the great danger; to-day it is "politik," the mysterious power of secret diplomacy. The stranger is still suspect in lands much nearer home.

In those parts of the Balkans where the tribal system was still in force, the reluctance of the tribe to admit a stranger was still marked. Off the beaten track a guide was a necessity, not merely to show the way but to act as a passport and explain one. In many places the peasant believed firmly in hidden treasure, and every stranger was suspected of knowing the spell by which to acquire and run off with it. A reason for the stranger's presence is required.

Krsto Pejovitch, when I first went up-country with him, began to explain me so soon as we got off the highroad. He was showman, so to speak, and I was the monkey to his organ-grinding. On arrival at a han he would begin loudly: "She can read and write several languages. She can make pictures without a machine [i.e. draw]. She can sing. She can," etc. According to Krsto there were few things I could not do. Moreover, the Montenegrin proverb says: "Long hair, short wits, a woman's head," and as I wore my hair short, an uncommon thing in those days, the simple folk accepted the fact that my wits were necessarily long. Krsto would point this out, and add, in an aside, to bachelors: "She is not married, and God knows how rich."

When I protested, he declared this was the right way to conduct a tour, and he knew all about it. I had come to see real Montenegrin life—and I saw it. But so long as I live I shall feel for the luckless dancing bear who is prodded up to perform once more when dead tired, and remember the days when I could not make a note or a sketch except before a changing crowd as curious as monkeys, which flocked to see a woman who could not only write but write English. As often

Montenegrins EF5

Serbs EFL

Bulgaria EE1

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began and I was propitiated on all sides. It was the thing to ask me into the nearest house and stuff me with food, and for days my hotel bills were almost nil. But that was in the days of the Obrenovitch, when the Karageorgevitches had been exiled for ever and ever for having murdered Prince Michael. They now reign over wide lands for having murdered the Archduke Ferdinand.

We, too, have a stranger craze. We still hedge the stranger with difficulties until, or unless, we think fit to feast him at the Guildhall, hoping earnestly that by thus feeding the beast we may induce him to work magic in our favour with tariffs or arm his compatriots on our behalf.

2. THE NAME TABOO

Among many primitive races all the world over a man's name is part of himself. Just as spells to hurt a man may be wrought by means of bits of his hair or nails, so, too, can evil be worked by using his name. The name is, therefore, a thing to be carefully guarded. Thus is the name taboo explained by authorities on the subject.

The taboo is common in the Balkans. In 1904, among the Bulgars of Macedonia, I had to classify long lists of refugees. Woman after woman would give her name as "Maria," and refuse, with tears running down her cheeks, to give her husband's name, or any clue to her identity, save perhaps the name of her father in a distant village. "They are ashamed. You must not ask such a thing," I was told. I had asked an indecent question and hurt their feelings. "Ask another woman." The Maria in question would hurry from the room, while I learnt from a woman of the same village that the husband's name was Dmitri, son of George. This constantly happened when I have dealt with Bulgar and Albanian refugees. The explanation always is that they are "modest."

In Montenegro the custom was nearly dead—but not quite. Old folk still thought it improper for man and wife to name each other. The schoolmaster at Tzrmnitza told me that there were still many who had never done so. Savo Vuletitch, himself a Montenegrin, in one of his admirable tales of Montenegro, tells how "Petar Radisitch, though he had lived on the best of terms with his wife for full twenty years, had never called her by her name, nor even spoken to her as a human being, on any subject, if it were possible for a stranger to overhear. Had he to speak to her in public he muttered through his teeth, and she did the same by him. To have done otherwise would have been shameful."

A plan I found adopted was that the man gave his order in the

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184 third person without looking at his wife: "She is to bring coffee."
551 Or turned his back and gave the order over his shoulder: "Bring
576 coffee." If he had to mention his wife or present her, the older men
still did so with a formal apology: "Da oprostish—moja zhena" ("If
you will pardon me—my wife"). This I heard often enough. The men-
tion of any female relative was avoided, and a man with daughters
but no sons would emphatically declare he had no children. The girl
child was made to feel her inferiority early. "A man feeds his son for
himself, but his daughter for another man," she was told.

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606 The name taboo till recently extended to other members of a
household. The daughter-in-law, when brought to the family house,
551 was not to call her new in-laws by their baptismal names.

576 "She dared not, for modesty," says Vuk Karadjitch. She addressed
them all by nicknames which implied admiration or respect. Thus she
called the elder brethren of the house Gospodin (sir), or Djever
(brother-in-law), or even Ago (a great Aga). The younger more
familiarly, as Sokolo (falcon), Miloshto (dear one), Zlatoye (golden one),
or Krasni (the handsome). The elder women of the house were
called Gospa (lady); the sisters-in-law Snasha, if they were the
wives of the husband's brothers. If they were the unmarried sisters
of the husband, who would all be very young in a land where girls
are often married at fourteen, they were given fancy names, such as
Lepotitza or Ubavitza (pretty little one), or Gospodjitz (little lady),
or Golubitza (little dove). Beyond the family circle I found no trace
of name taboo in Montenegro.

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551 In the North Albanian mountains, however, in the Dukagin districts,
553 it was decidedly unadvisable for a man's real name to be known.

Especially in Shala, Shoshi, and Nikaj, I found it customary for men
to adopt another name. It was a constant annoyance to the Franciscans
that, though they baptized their flocks with good Albanian Christian
names such as Kol (Nicholas), Gin (John), Ded (Dominic), or Pietr
(Peter), the lads, on growing up, persisted in calling themselves by
[571] another name, preferably a Moslem one. They rigidly kept the fasts;

● 784 they flocked to church on a feast day; according to their rather dim
lights they fulfilled some, at least, of their religious duties. But they
called themselves Hussein, or Ismail, or Mehmed, and no plea or
threat of the priest could budge them. I was once asked by a Franciscan
to express my horror of the practice to a whole party of men. I therefore
said no one in England would believe they were Christians if they
had such names. They did not like this and crossed themselves
repeatedly in proof of their faith. But on this question they were
obstinate. They did it "because they wished to," "because the names
were beautiful" and, most convincing of all, "because we always do."

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Both the name and the food taboos being even to-day so common in the Balkans, it is strange to find Herodotus, so many centuries ago, mentioning both as peculiar customs of the Ionians and explaining them thus: "Even those who esteemed themselves the most noble of the Ionians on first settling in the country brought no wives, but married a number of Carian women whose husbands they put to death. In consequence of this violence the women made a compact which they delivered to their daughters never to sit at meals with their husbands nor to call them by their appropriate names" (Bk. I, c. xli). He, however, expressly states that these Ionians were of very mixed origin, saying that: "Molossians, Pelasgians of Arcadia, and Dorians of Epidaurus were mingled with them." These are some of the oldest known Balkan tribes. The Molossians especially were in South Albania. The food and name taboos were thus possibly brought from the Balkans to Asia by the men. Judging by the present Balkan peoples, it is far more likely that the customs should have been enforced by them on their captured wives than that Herodotus's explanation should be correct.

4. TABOO ON SHOWING THE FACE

The amount of veiling done by the women varies very considerably among the Balkan peoples, I know. The most closely veiled and hooded of all were the Moslem Slavs of Mostar and Serajevo. The Moslem Slav, whether called Serb or Croat, is a very strict Mohammedan.

This may be because the Bosnians and Herzegovinians—the Bosnians more especially—adopted Islam in many cases as early as the fifteenth century, whereas the Albanians, upon whom it sits far more lightly, and a very large number of whom belong to the heretical Bektashi sect, became Mohammedan mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and some in the nineteenth. The women of the Moslem Albanian mountain tribes are never veiled, and will come to market and bargain freely with any man, their faces more exposed than those of many Christians.

In the towns, which were under the rule of Turkish officials whose womenfolk possibly set the fashions, the Albanian Moslem women were all more or less closely veiled. In Dulcigno they almost exceeded the hooding of Mostar, and have preserved the custom under the rule of the Montenegrin, which was forced upon them by the pious efforts of Mr. Gladstone.

The veiling of women was, however, not unknown in Ancient Greece, and the veiling or partial veiling of both men and women was practised in various primitive and non-Moslem lands. The usual explanation of

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the Serb chieftain. Maybe Novak was by race one of the "under-dogs" of the old Serb Empire—a serf or slave. H
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In a Montenegrin ballad, dictated to me by Krsto and which I do not know in print, the smith again appears as low caste. Milosh of Drobnjak bids his sister take his brown horse to be shod by Suljo the Gipsy. Suljo refuses to do so unless he may kiss her. Milosh rides away on the unshod horse, and on his return rode to Suljo's. "When Suljo saw him he was afeared. He took his cap in his left hand, and in his right, the hammer and tongs to shoe Milosh's brown horse. But Milosh smote the gipsy with his sword. Though he struck him but lightly, he cleft him in twain. And thus spoke Milosh: 'Well, Suljo! Dost wish to kiss my sister now?'" M
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The smith was low class and of another race.

How different from these benighted ideas are those of our higher civilization. It is universally recognized that the making and selling of machines for killing the people over the border is the most honourable of trades. Far from being classed as a Black Gipsy, the armament dealer receives a title, and can marry anybody's daughter. H
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But a fear or dislike of iron has been widespread. When one considers its great usefulness and the ages it has been in use, it is incomprehensible that the idea it was uncanny should have been so persistent. No iron tool, we are told, was used in building the Temple at Jerusalem. Iron might not be used to repair the Pons Sublicius at Rome. Roman priests had to shave with bronze, not iron razors. The uncanny properties of magnetic iron and the rooted dislike of the human race for innovations are not enough to account for it; and it appears that this dread of iron was transferred to the workers of it and long clung to them.

I found the uncanny power of iron still recognized in the Balkans. Iron drives off evil spirits. When I was living in Montenegro many a "junak" (hero) who boasted freely of his courage did not like passing a graveyard at night. That cheeriest of boasters, Krsto, was hurt when I told him such fear was not compatible with "junashtvo." If obliged to pass such places after dark he thought it indispensable to carry a knife. This was not meant for stabbing the ghost. Oh, no! He would have run away at its first appearance. It was to keep the ghost off. In fact, the necessary piece of iron. One would have thought the revolver every man carried had iron enough to frighten any ghost. Not at all. A knife it must be. This, no doubt, because the belief dates from many centuries before the invention of fire-arms, to the days when a knife was the handiest piece of portable iron; and ever since then it has remained the recognized protector. M
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In North Albania a shovel or hoe was always left in a grave until 764